

**Congressman Michael M. Honda**

**11/07/2009 - Statement for the Record**

**H.R 3962**

In our lives as public servants, Members of Congress are rarely presented with opportunities to support the passage of truly historic legislation. Today is such a day, and this health care vote such an opportunity. Over the past ten months that I have participated in the creation of this health reform bill, I have been thinking about the words of Hubert Humphrey: "It was once said that the moral test of government is how that government treats those who are in the dawn of life, the children; those who are in the twilight of life, the elderly; and those who are in the shadows of life, the sick, the needy and the handicapped."

Today I rise in strong support of H.R. 3962, the Affordable Health Care for America Act. For 70 years Americans have been waiting for this moment. I would like to particularly thank Speaker Pelosi for her deft leadership and management of a complex policy debate, Majority Leader Hoyer, Majority Whip Clyburn, the Chairs of the Committees on Energy and Commerce, Education and Labor, and Ways and Means, along with my fellow progressive and colleagues in the Congressional Asian Pacific American Caucus, Congressional Black Caucus, and Congressional Hispanic Caucus (collectively known as the TriCaucus) for their public and private commitments to preserve the public option. Finally, I commend staff of all the committees for their hard work and commitment to this issue.

Against an organized, scorched earth campaign of misinformation and fear mongering, we are emerging with a strong bill, and an even stronger sense of unity and purpose in our fight to bring access, affordability, and high quality health care to every person in America. If the best of our reforms prevail, insurance companies will no longer be able to subject people to complex, confusing policy details, lifetime and annual limits, or denials based on pre-existing conditions. American taxpayers will save over \$100 billion in the first decade and will experience significant improvements in our health care system.

Although I have strenuously supported a stronger public option, I recognize that the balance of improvements made to the health care system as a whole through the reforms in this bill is substantial. When some thought the public option was dead, I and my other colleagues rallied to bring it back into the discussion and succeeded in keeping the public option in the final bill. The public option is a cornerstone of the effort to bend the cost curve in health care and must be preserved.

In my district alone, HR 3962 will improve employer based coverage for 500,000 residents,

allow 16,700 small businesses to obtain affordable health care coverage and provide coverage for 28,000 uninsured residents. Finally, in a time of increasing pressure on local governments, it will reduce the cost of uncompensated care for hospitals and health care providers by \$205 million. It will protect the seniors in my district from the doughnut hole and improve the quality of their Medicare coverage.

As Chairman of the Congressional Asian Pacific American Caucus, I am particularly encouraged by the inclusion of legislative language addressing racial and ethnic health disparities. As members of the Tri-Caucus, we have long been advocating on the issue of health disparities and I am proud of the impact we have had in making changes that will directly help the poorest and most disadvantaged communities across this nation. As a long-time supporter of Native Americans in their struggle to survive and thrive after hundreds of years of oppression and genocide, I am particularly pleased by the inclusion of the Indian Comprehensive Health Insurance Act in health care reform. Native American communities worked for over a decade to come together and write policy that would help their communities begin to address the terrible and tragic health disparities they experience and the inclusion of ICHIA is a step in the right direction by the Federal Government to rectify some of the imbalances and abuses that they have caused in Native communities.

Despite the many extraordinary improvements to many aspects of our healthcare system, including an unprecedented expansion of access to Medicaid for many poor families, I am dismayed that we were not able to lift the 5 year bar on legal immigrant participation in Medicaid. Legal immigrants are tax paying citizens in waiting who work hard and contribute. It is only fair that we afford them equal access to the benefits of Medicaid. I will continue to advocate on this issue in the future and I know that I am joined in my concern by many of my colleagues.

Americans live in the wealthiest, most powerful nation in the world and spend \$2 trillion a year on health care every year – more than the national budget of China - and yet we don't have the best health care in the world. Thousands suffer and many die because of a lack of access to health care. Passing this bill and preserving its structure is a critical investment in the health of future generations.